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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002245

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PROMOTING DISCUSSIONS OF THE COMPLEMENTARY NATURE OF ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

REF: STATE 116583

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b), (d)

1.(U) In response to reftel para 3 request, the GOT has not yet formed a delegation for the November Community of Democracies Ministerial in Mali, according to the MFA. The Turks, currently in the process of forming a new government, are likely to select participants within a few weeks, once the cabinet receives a vote of confidence and gets up to speed, according to our contacts.

2.(C) Turkey is well-suited to participate in a meeting of Muslim-majority nations on the margins of the CD Ministerial. Turkey's own long struggle against terrorism and its cooperative role in combating terror since September 11 suggest GOT delegates would condemn use of terrorism in the name of Islam or to achieve political goals at any such meeting.

3.(C) GOT officials are unlikely, however, to take an active role in calling or hosting a meeting. In the lead-up to parliamentary elections, tension rose as society debated the acceptable role of Islam in politics. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which was formed as an offshoot of an Islamic-oriented party, won a resounding victory in the elections but continues to face accusations that its "hidden" agenda is to increase the role of Islam in Turkey. In the coming months, AKP is likely to avoid any actions that could open it up to renewed accusations that it is pursuing an Islamist agenda.

4.(C) Several respected individuals from civil society, academia, and politics, would likely participate, if invited. These leaders, all well-respected beyond their professional fields, have spoken publicly on the complementary nature of democracy and Islam.

Sencer Ayata, Dean of Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University (METU): A long time friend of the Embassy, Professor Ayata is one of Turkey's top experts on the role of Islam, politics, and democracy in Turkish society.

Erol Tuncer, Director, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV): As an expert on the relationship between religion and secularism in a democracy, Erol Tuncer strives to improve dialogue between Turkey's political parties through seminars and dialogues hosted by his think-tank TEPAV.

Selma Acuner, Professor, Center for EU Studies, Ankara University: Selma Acuner is a prominent figure in the Turkish womens' movement. Acuner works through the NGO Ka-Der, which aims to increase the role of women in politics. Unlike many other NGOs, Ka-Der included Islamic-oriented women.

Hasan Celel Guzel, Owner, New Turkey magazine: A previous Minister of State, Hasan Celel Guzel is a religious-oriented politician who was brought to trial on several occasions for his views. Guzel uses his magazine to promote democracy including freedom of religion.

Emre Kocaoglu, Director, Turkish Democracy Foundation: Since his time as member of the Turkish Parliament's Human Rights Committee, Emre Kocaoglu has been one of Turkey's top advocates of freedom of religion as a human right.

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